REMARKS

Reconsideration And Allowance Are Respectfully Requested.

Claims 2, 9, 11-14, 16-18, 21, 26 and 29-34 are currently pending. Claims 1, 3-8, 10, 15, 19, 20, 22-25, 27 and 28 have been canceled. Claims 2, 9, 11-14, 16-18, 21 and 26 have been amended. New claims 29-34 have been added. No new matter has been added. Reconsideration is respectfully requested.

With regard to the outstanding rejections, claims 2, 9, 11-18, 21 and 26-28 stand rejected under 35 U.S.C. §103(a) as being unpatentable over U.S. Patent No. 4,796,402 to Pajala (Pajala) in view of U.S. Patent No. 4,169,688 to Toshio (Toshio). This rejection is respectfully traversed in view of the preceding amendments and the remarks which follow.

In particular, claim 2 has been amended so as to define a multidirectional laminate flooring panel for use in constructing a floor. The flooring panel includes a top surface, a bottom surface and a middle substrate. The middle substrate has identical grooves formed therein and edges extending between the top and bottom surfaces. The edges include identical profiles. The flooring panel further includes an outwardly tapering channel associated with each edge and extending substantially parallel to each respective edge. The channel is formed within the bottom surface and includes a top portion and outwardly tapering walls extending from the top portion toward the bottom of the flooring panel such the channel becomes wider as it extends from the top portion toward the bottom of the flooring panel to create an opening which is wider at the bottom of the flooring panel then at the top of the flooring panel.

Independent claims 9 and 26 have been similarly amended so as to define the shape of the channel permitting lateral connection of adjacent laminate flooring panels.

In contrast to the claimed invention, Pajala discloses a basic laminate flooring panel having traditional tongue and groove edge profiles. Toshio has been applied as teaching the obviousness of modifying Pajala so as to include identical edge profiles along the entire periphery of the flooring panel, as well as the addition of channels along the bottom surface of the flooring panel.

However, and in contrast to claimed invention, neither Pajala nor Toshio disclose channels that become wider as they extend from the top portion toward the bottom of the flooring panel. More specifically, Toshio discloses recesses 9 in the underside of the floor. The recesses, as shown in Figures 8A and 8B, may extend either inwardly or outwardly depending upon the construction of the connecting member. However, the recesses do not become wider as they extend from the top portion toward the bottom portion, since this would be contrary to the requirements of the connection mechanism utilized by Toshio.

Since the connection member utilized by Toshio is substantially different from that disclosed and claimed in accordance with the present invention, it is Applicant's opinion that amended claims 2, 9 and 26 overcome the prior art of record and Applicant respectfully requests that the rejections relating thereto be withdrawn. As to those claims respectively dependent upon independent claims 2, 9 and 26, they are also believed to overcome the prior art of record for the reasons presented above.

In addition, new claims 29-34 have been added. These new claims further define the channel shape. In particular, claims 29, 31 and 33 define that each channel includes a first wall extending from the top portion toward the bottom of the flooring panel and a second wall

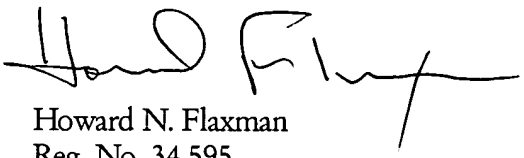
extending from the top portion toward the bottom of the flooring panel, wherein the first wall and the second wall extend in opposite directions relative to a plane extending through a center of the top portion and perpendicular to a plane in which the flooring panel lies.

In addition, claims 30, 32 and 34 further define that each channel includes a first wall extending from the top portion toward the bottom of the flooring panel and the second wall extending from the top portion toward the bottom of the flooring panel, wherein the first wall defines and obtuse angle relative to the bottom of the flooring panel and the second wall defines an obtuse angle relative to the bottom of the flooring panel.

These claims further define the shape of a channel, which is very different from that disclosed by Toshio. As such, and further to the reasons presented above with regard to independent claims 2, 9 and 26, claims 29-34 are also believed to overcome the prior art of record.

It is believed that this case is in condition for allowance and reconsideration thereof and early issuance is respectfully requested. If it is felt that an interview would expedite prosecution of this application, please do not hesitate to contact applicants' representative at the below number.

Respectfully submitted,



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